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ABSTRACT

Inverted sentence order (order other than subject-verb-object) may be used to mimic the rhythm of real dialogue; give the play-by-play announcer time to come up with the player's name; indicate the relative importance of the subject, verb, and object; distribute information; and indicate connection with prior information. As a stylistic option, inversion also permits longer sentences which makes it possible to pack them with more information. (TJ)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Technical Report No. 98

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF INVERSION CONSTRUCTIONS

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Discourse Functions of Inversion Constructions

Introduction

In this paper I discuss the usage of some constructions which I have been puzzling over for some time. These constructions all display a non-canonical word order, and all have grammatical counterparts with a canonical (S V (O) (Adv)) word order, whose truth conditions are identical, as exemplified in (1).

1a. Outside stood a little angel.

1b. A little angel stood outside.

My task in this paper will be to elucidate the raisons d'etre of such constructions; after all, why should a language sanction two or more ways of saying the same thing? Becker (1978) and Laff (1978) have suggested that one reason for the existence of constructions with non-canonical word order is that they allow speakers to avoid marked intonations without sacrificing intended emphasis. I am going to claim that the existence of such alternative non-canonical constructions as (1a) allows language users to exploit alternative word orders for a variety of purposes, ranging from facilitating encoding, to creating a diverse host of specific rhetorical effects.

It is worth noting that while sentences like (1b) normally have one intonation peak, sentences like (1a) typically have two, one in the preposed phrase, and one in the postposed phrase. This intonation is surely not independent of at least some uses of sentences like (1a), and I do not wish to be understood as claiming that it is. My purpose here, however, is simply to describe some of the communicative functions that constructions like (1a) are exploited to serve, and I will not have much more

to say about intonation in this regard.

The relevance of this work for research on reading comprehension is clear: if my claim is correct that inversion constructions are not optional, "merely stylistic," variants of uninverted constructions, but communicative rhetorical devices which can be used by a writer to convey any of a number of attitudes toward or relations among events or objects described in the text, then full comprehension of texts containing such constructions entails comprehension of what these constructions contribute. Such comprehension obviously cannot be measured or evaluated until it is known exactly what is conveyed by the use of these constructions, which is the goal of the research reported here. Insofar as some of these constructions are relatively frequent in narrative prose written for children (much more frequent in terms of occurrences per page, or occurrences per 1000 words within a given text than in narrative prose written for adults), the investigation is a very necessary one for the larger goal of characterizing the nature of texts children are expected to be able to read and understand. (Examples of inversions from texts written for children are identified by text title.)

Some Inversions

The constructions I will be discussing are all inversions--constructions where the subject follows all or part of the verb phrase. A sampling of these, with syntactically descriptive names is given in (2).

2a. Sitting down is Kevin Jones. (Inversion after Present Participial Phrase Preposing)

2b. Scheduled to testify were representatives of RCA Global Communications, ITT World Communications, Western Union, Western Union International, as well as Joe R. Craig, a former FBI agent. (Inversion after Past Participial Phrase Preposing)

2c. "She's too young to play," said Mrs. Rabbit. (Inversion after Preposed Quote) (Miffy)

2d. Through the half-open windows drifted the mingled smell of wood smoke and freshmen. (Inversion after Directional Phrase Preposing)

2e. Up the rolling ridge of Giggles Hill, a mile back from the Pennsylvania bank of the Delaware River, stands a modest stone house, pretty much as it stood during the last century. (Inversion after Locative Phrase Preposing)

2f. In a little white house lived two rabbits. (Inversion after Locative Phrase Preposing) (Miffy)

2g. Next came the middle-sized Billy Goat Gruff. (Inversion after Temporal Adverb Preposing)

There are many other kinds of inversions, of course, including even There-Insertion sentences, but not all can serve the same functions. The inversions in (3), for example, do not strike me as capable of serving any functions not served by their uninverted counterparts in (4).

3a. I spend less than do nine out of ten people in my position. (Inversion in Comparative Clause)

3b. Well, had I sent the creature packing, it would have taught her a lesson, and averted ultimate grief. (Inversion in Counterfactual Conditional after Suppressed "if")

4a. I spend less than nine out of ten people in my position do.

4b. Well, if I had sent the creature packing, it would have taught her a lesson, and averted ultimate grief.

It is tempting to suppose that the inversions in (2) are all governed by some broad and general pragmatic principle such as the "old information

first, new information last" dictum of some Prague School linguists. But it is a trivial matter to show that this is inadequate as a general characterization of inversion. For instance, in context, example (2c) follows the sentence, "May we play with her?" cheeped the yellow chicks. What is new is the auotation, what Mrs. Rabbit said, not Mrs. Rabbit, or the fact that she is the one who answered a question addressed to her. Likewise, example (2f) is the first sentence in a story. It is all "new information," but it can't all go last.

Examination of these constructions in their natural contexts, in vivo, as it were, suggests that inversions serve two complementary grammatical functions, but may be exploited (i.e. used by speakers) to serve a whole host of pragmatic functions. More specifically, these constructions effect two kinds of change in constituent order: grammatically, they place the subject after all or part of the verb phrase, and (in many cases) they put something else in the position normally filled by a subject; but pragmatically, a speaker may choose to do one or both of these things for a variety of reasons, from a variety of motivations or exigencies.

A Practical Function

The most striking demonstration of this pragmatic exploitation of syntax that I know of is the use of inversions in the play-by-play broadcast of sports events--one of the few situations where inversions are used in speech with any appreciable frequency.

A variety of inversion types are found, as illustrated in (5), though it should be observed that each broadcaster has his own style, and may

tend to use only one or two types.[1]

5a. Underneath is Smith. (TV) (Inversion after Locative Adverb Preposing)

5b. Underneath the basket is Barbian. (Radio) (Inversion after Locative Phrase Preposing)

5c. High in the air to get the ball was Jim Brady. (TV) (Inversion after Locative Adverb Preposing)

5d. Now way out front with the ball is Brenner. (Radio) (Inversion after Locative Adverb Preposing)

5e. At the line will be Skowronski. (TV) (Inversion after Locative Adverb Preposing)

5f. At the line for Lanphier will be Shelly Tunson. (Radio) (Inversion after Locative Adverb Preposing)

5g. Stealing it and then losing it was Dave Bonko. (TV) (Inversion after Present Participial Phrase Preposing)

5h. Trying to save it was Shelly Tunson. (Radio) (Inversion after Present Participial Phrase Preposing)

5i. Bringing the ball up is Marty Mestemacher. (Radio) (Inversion after Present Participial Phrase Preposing)

5j. Coming back into the game for New Trier West will be Kevin Jones. (TV) (Inversion after Present Participial Phrase Preposing)

5k. And sitting down is Kevin Jones. (Radio) (Inversion after Present Participial Phrase Preposing)

5l. Back come the Kahoks with the ball. (TV) (Inversion after Directional Adverb Preposing)

5m. Here comes Mestemacher with the ball for the Kahoks. (Radio) (Inversion after Directional Adverb Preposing)

5n. And in comes number 51, and that will be Mike Matakitis. (TV) (Inversion after Directional Adverb Preposing)

5o. Down with the rebound comes Roan. (TV) (Inversion after Directional Adverb Preposing)

5p. Into the game for New Trier West is Brenner. (TV)[2] (Inversion after Directional Phrase Preposing)

5q. Into the ball game is Dave Brenner. (Radio) (Inversion after Directional Phrase Preposing)

It may be seen that in all of these constructions the inverted, postponed subject is a reference to a player, almost always a player's name. The sentences all identify a player in terms of a location or an act just performed. Inversion allows the speaker to mention the location or act first, then identify the individual located, or carrying out the act. This is helpful to the TV audience, since they don't have scorecards identifying the players by their numbers, which is all that they can see. Mentioning the player's name first and then his location or the play he has just made would require more concentration on their part; they would have to keep the name in mind while waiting for a description, then remember back who was where, doing what a moment before in order to connect a player with the name, which is the purpose of the identification in the first place. When the predicate comes first, the scene may still be visible (or at least less remote), and the inversion gives the audience time to match up the description with a real-world orientation of entities, singling out one entity in relation to others, and then provides additional information, the name, for that item.

But one gets the feeling that the use of inversion isn't so much for the TV audience's benefit (remember, radio announcers use the same forms) as it is for the sportscaster's. The inversion construction allows him to describe the play while (in real time) looking up the player's number

and finding out (or mentally recalling) his name, so that he can inform his listeners. It is not surprising, then, that a number of other constructions are found in play-by-play broadcasts of basketball games in which the identified player is not mentioned until late in the sentence. Some announcers describe the action in terms of the peregrinations of the ball (6a), or the type of pass or shot (6b); passives are occasionally found (6c,d), as well as extrapositions from NP (6e), and indirect object constructions (6f). There are also fragments, where the player's name follows a description of his location (6g,h) or the shot (6i). In fact, if a player's name is a syntactic subject, it is more often inverted than not in sentences used in describing the action play by play.

6a. Down the corner it goes to May.

6b. Here's a reverse lay-up--good--by Dave Skowronski.

6c. Here's a long pass, and a lay-up by Ray is blocked very nicely by McHale.

6d. Now the ball is knocked out of the hands of Bonko, and they're gonna give the ball to DelaSalle. Knocking the ball out was Joe Ossola.

6e. The tip is good by Joe May, his second basket.

6f. And the rebound goes to Joe May. In the corner Gordon Smith.

6h. Baseline Malnati.

6i. Shot is no good. Rebound. Kevin Jones.

Connective Functions

While play-by-play sports announcers take advantage of a variety of inversion constructions to buy time before they have to name the agent,

or salient recipient, of a reported action, the writers of news stories exploit a slightly different set of inversion constructions for other ends. Examples of inversions typical of, and more or less restricted to news stories are listed in (7).

7a. Supporting merger were Lachlan Blair, Mary Blair, Phillips Garman, Linda Bronston, and David Lindstrom. (Inversion after Preposed Present Participial Phrase)

7b. Dead were the pilot, Robert Conduff Jr., 38, Fort Hood, Tex., Theresa's stepfather; her mother, Frances Conduff, 48, and her half-sister, Maria Frances Foster, 14. (Inversion after Preposed Adjective Phrase)

7c. At issue is Section 1401(a) of the Controlled Substances Act. (Inversion after Preposed Abstract Prepositional Phrase)

Examples (7a) and (7b) are notable in containing "heavy" subjects, so it might be supposed that euphony, or balance, is the motivation for inversion. However, grammatical sentences which are acceptable can be constructed with these subjects in initial position, and predicates no longer than those in (7), as shown in (7'), so achievement of some kind of phonological balance is not a sufficient condition for inversion here.

7'a. Lachlan Blair, Mary Blair, Phillips Garman, Linda Bronston and David Lindstrom all supported merger.

7'b. The pilot, Robert Conduff Jr., 38, Fort Hood, Tex., Theresa's stepfather; her mother, Frances Conduff, 48, and her half-sister, Maria Frances Foster, 14, all died.

More to the point that I would like to make, all of these sentences occurred well within a news article--none could begin an article--and all conform to an 'old information first, new information last' distribution of the information they bear. But the reason they conform to this distribution

of information is not that sentences in general are supposed to. Rather, the preverbal predicate phrases in (7a-c) perform a connective function in indicating the relevance and importance of the individuals or entities to be named in the postponed subject to the events and issues that have been reported up to the point where they occur. Thus, the crucial aspect of these constructions is not really the inversion, but the preposing of the predicate; given preposing of these predicate types, inversion seems to be required by the rules of grammar.[3] And it is not surprising that we can imagine other ways to convey this information which allow the words with content to appear at the beginning of the sentence and connect the "new" information to what has already been said, as in (8).

8a. Council members supporting merger were ...

8aa. The merger plan was supported by council members ...

8aaa. The merger plan got support from council members ...

8b. Victims of the crash were ...

8bb. The crash killed ...

8bbb. The dead are ...

8c. The cases will test ...

8cc. The controversial section is ...

8ccc. Mayberry's attorney will challenge ...

What makes the inversion constructions particularly attractive for newswriting must be their conciseness--they are all shorter than the alternatives I suggested which retained the same distribution of "new" and "old" information. Thus, inversion allows the newswriter to write a very concise

sentence which begins with "old information." Since this old information also indicates the relationship of the new information that follows in the subject NP to the point of the article, it is a considerable help in packing as much information as possible into as short a text as possible, while preserving coherence and readability, by presenting information in the order

Ground (old information), Relator--Related

The connective function of inversion is not restricted to newswriting of course. Examples like those in (9) are typical of more literary descriptive or expository prose, and those in (10), of narrative. The examples in (9) are from essays by S. J. Perelman, James Thurber, Brendan Gill, and Leo Rosten. Those in (10) are from narratives by S. J. Perelman and Rex Stout.

9a. This is called the New York Marble Cemetery, and a block away, open to the view of the passerby, is another known by the same name, the most tranquil cemetery in town to look upon, probably.

9b. Sprawled in the foreground is George Price.

9c. Holding the stick of this four-hundred-mile-an-hour ship is a small firm hand.

9d. In so emphatic, consistent, and homogeneous a consensus was born the useful, if quixotic institution of the professional matchmaker.

9e. Attached to it, as always, is an application blank for next year's license.

9f. Stacked on shelves were hundreds of castiron horses, wagons, fire engines, banks, tin clowns, doll houses, carousels, miniature railways, and so on ad infinitum.

10a. Back of the Arkoffs and Irwins were William Lesser and Patrick Degan, and between them and slightly to the rear was Saul Panzer.

10b. Seated next to me was a sprightly oldster in a brand-new suit set off by an opulent watch chain.

10c. On such gossamer threads does one's destiny impend.

The connective effect of the preposed phrases in the inversions in examples (9a) and (9b) is fairly clear even without further context. Example (9a), taken from a James Thurber passage describing a walk in New York City, introduces the second cemetery by giving the spatial relation of it to the first. Example (9b), which is part of the description of a picture (as indicated by the word foreground) is very much like the news examples. It identifies a piece of the picture, an individual, by locating him with reference to something already salient, the picture as a whole. Example (9c) is also from the description of a picture, and the preposed participial phrase, by an anaphoric definite description (this four-hundred-mile-an-hour ship) relates the "firm hand" to the Hellcat fighter plane mentioned in the sentence which precedes it in context. However, it is also relevant here that inversion puts the subject in final "focused," "new information" position; since the point of the description is that it is a description of an advertisement for DuBarry Beauty Preparations, it is relevant, in fact, important, that the hand is a small and firm one such as might belong to a young woman. Example (9d), with an equally obviously anaphoric reference, so, relates the description of opinions about marriage (described in the preceding paragraphs) in a culture which has a lexical item for 'married man' to a related cultural institution, the professional

matchmaker. This kind of anaphoric connective is perhaps even clearer in an example like (9g):

> 9g. On the other hand, it is hardly credible, after a look through the collection shortly to follow, that the writers can have chosen these inversions either as the natural way of expressing themselves or as graceful decoration; so unnatural and so ungraceful are many of them.

Examples (9e) and (9f) serve to introduce new topics, old fashioned toys, and license applications, gently, by relating them to the current topics, a Parke Bernet auction room, and a new driver's license, respectively. This way they avoid a discontinuity that might have been distracting if the subjects of these sentences had been at the beginning.

Example (10c) is syntactically similar to (9d), in that the anaphoric such refers to previous description (in this case, a spur of the moment interpretation of ambiguous body language implied in previous sentences) and thereby connects previous discourse to what follows in the rest of the sentence. What follows here is a predication about such interpretations, that they influence one's destiny.

Examples (10a) and (10b) both appear to introduce individuals, but there is a difference. Example (10a) comes near the end of a detective novel; all of the individuals mentioned are familiar to the reader. This sentence serves in the description of the setting in which the detective will reveal his unravelling of the mystery, and accuse one of the company of being the murderer, and the inversion merely locates those individuals named in the subject NP with respect to those named in the preposed prepositional phrase, whose location has already been described. Example

(10b) is syntactically quite similar except in the category of the preposed phrase, but serves to introduce a new character into the narrative, which it does by relating him to the location of the protagonist-narrator at this point in the narrative.

It will not do to say that the connection is the effect of an "old information first--new information last" distribution which inversion accomplishes, for in fact, there is nothing "old" in many of the sentence-initial phrases besides a pronoun or definite article. And in some examples, e.g. (9f), there is no "old information" at all; as indicated by the absence of a definite article, shelves have not even been mentioned before. All of these inversions begin with "new information"--relational predicates like attached and back of, or descriptive predicates like holding and sprawled, or combinations like seated next to. Far from reflecting an "old information first" principle, in all of the examples in (9) and (10), where the grammatical function of inversion, constituent re-ordering, has been exploited for a connective effect, it is the predicate-first order (a new information first order) which inversion allows, that accomplishes this effect.

Introductory Function

Examples (9a), (9c), (10a), and (10b) are examples of what I have elsewhere referred to as the scene-setting function of inversions. Its purest form is perhaps that found in the travelogue style, as in (9a), but it can also be exploited to establish setting and principals in a narrative as in (11a-c).

11a. In a little white house lived two rabbits. (Miffy)

11b. Into the consulting room of a fairly mad physician, whose name I somehow remember as Lucas Membrane, hurtled a haggard middle-aged woman, towing her husband, a psychotic larrikin about seven feet tall.

11c. Down the dusty Chisholm Trail into Abilene rode taciturn Spit Weaver, his lean brown face an enigma, his six-gun swinging idly from the pommel of Moisshe, the wonder horse.

These examples differ from the examples in (9) and (10) in that the preposed adverbial phrases do not serve a connective function; they do not locate the postponed subject phrases with respect to anything referred to before the adverbial. Rather, they locate the referents of the subject NPs "absolutely." For example, (11a), which is the first sentence of a narrative, first implies the existence of a little white house, and then introduces the two protagonists in terms of their relation to the house. Here, it is the verb which serves the connective function, and the inversion of subject and verb is dictated by pragmatic as well as syntactic considerations. That is, absence of inversion would have yielded the order,

Ground - Related - Relator

which does not serve the connective function of the sentence nearly as well as the observed

Ground - Relator - Related.

This order differs from that instantiated in the examples of connective functions, where the verb inverted over is <u>be</u>, for there the ground and relator are combined in the same constituent (the preposed adverbial or predicate), though, of course, it still precedes the Related.

Example (11b), which inverts the subject after a preposed directional rather than a locative, likewise initiates a narrative, and serves to introduce protagonists with respect to a background. What is particularly interesting about (11b) is that it is not the referent of the subject NP which inversion is exploited to introduce, but the referents of NPs which occur in modifiers. The main characters in this narrative are the husband, introduced in a phrase describing the postposed subject NP, and the physician, introduced in a similarly subordinate position in the introductory directional adverbial; the referent of the subject NP, the haggard, middle-aged woman, does not figure further in the narrative.

Example (11c) also beings a narrative, and does so by introducing a character into a setting described in a preposed directional phrase. It differs from (11b) in that the location is not referred to in the preposed directional phrase by an implied existential, but by definite reference ("the Chisholm Trail," "Abilene") to places assumed to be familiar to the reader, but the effect is the same.

Direct Quotes

Direct quotations, an almost entirely literary set of constructions, provide a very fertile ground for investigation of the function of word order, as at least three different orders are available,[4] as shown in (12).

12a. John said, "The newspaper is late again." (S V O/Q)

12b. "The newspaper is late again," John said. (O/Q S V)

12c. "The newspaper is late again," said John. (O/Q V S)

Recent work by Hermon (1978) on the distribution of these forms reveals a variety of functions that can be served by variation in constituent order in sentences containing direct quotations. As we shall see, these functions relate to different levels of text structure, so it is not always possible to predict the order of constituents in such sentences.

For instance, one effect of quote-preposing, as in (12b) and (12c) is to put the non-quote part of the sentence out of the way of the reader. That is, having the non-quote parts of the sentence at the end of each sentence in reporting dialogue makes the dialogue appear much closer to a natural conversation than it would if it consisted of a sequence of Speaker Verb Quote constructions, not only because the content of the dialogue appears first, but also because the rules of suprasegmental phonology make the preposed-over subject and verb phonologically inconspicuous, by assigning them low stress and lowered pitch, and I believe there is evidence, albeit anecdotal, that such phonological rules may be relevant even when their output is subvocal.

On the other hand, new characters, change of scene, or other relevant facts may be introduced into a narrative in quotation frames, as in (13), and here it seems unnatural to use a preposed quote.

13a. One day Babar said to General Cornelius, Doctor Capoulosse and Podular, the sculptor: "My dear friends, we shall soon be celebrating the anniversary of the founding of Celesteville, the elephants' city ..." (Babar's Fair)

13b. Cornelius, who is chief over all the elephants when the king is away, anxiously sighs, "I do hope they don't have any accidents." (Travels of Babar)

13c. In the gardens at Celesteville, the city of the elephants, Babar says, "Yes, this is certainly a Wully-Wully. He is very gentle and quite lovable." (Babar and the Wully-Wully)

In fact, generally when there is more information (e.g. adverbs, coordinate verbs or clauses, mention of the addressee) included in the non-quote part of a sentence than just the name of the speaker and the fact and/or mode of saying, the quote does not precede. Note that it is precisely in such cases that the frame ceases to be inconspicuous, and becomes important enough to the discourse to precede.[5]

We have observed that inversion of subject and verb puts the subject in clause-final position, as in (12c). If this is a position which emphasizes (or focuses on) "new information," then we should not find such forms when the subject is predictable, as in (14b).[6]

14a. "Uncle John," shouted Alexander, "that bag looks just like yours." "Yes, it may be my bag," Uncle John said, "but we must be sure."

14b. "Uncle John," shouted Alexander, "that bag looks just like yours." "Yes, it may be my bag," said Uncle John, "but we must be sure."

In fact, however, such forms seem only marginally less well-formed than their uninverted counterparts. Nor should we expect such forms to occur when the verb of saying describes more than the fact of speaking--i.e. with verbs like <u>retorted</u>, <u>mumbled</u>, <u>confessed</u>. But in fact there seems to be a good deal of flexibility in these cases. Out of context, (15b) seems no worse than (15a).

15a. "We could have another fair," Arthur whispered.

15b. "We could have another fair," whispered Arthur.

On the other hand, (16a) is appreciably better than (16b).

16a. "Meow, meow, meow," the kittens protest.

16b. "Meow, meow, meow," protest the kittens.

I suspect the reason has to do with the fact that in (16) the quoted sentence's being a protest is not inferrable from its form or "meaning." This means that protest in (16) is new information which is crucial to understanding the "content" of the quote--as whispered is not in (15). Compare to (16), (17a) and (17b), where (17b) seems better than (17a):

17a. "We could have another fair," Arthur suggested.

17b. "We could have another fair," suggested Arthur.

Here, the fact that the quoted sentence We could have another fair is a suggestion is inferrable from the form (could) and meaning, so the verb suggest is redundant, and out of place in the "'new information' slot." The sentences in (18) are perhaps an even clearer example of this.

18a. "Well," the Little Red Hen asked, "will you help me take this wheat to the mill, Pig?"

18b. "Well," asked the Little Red Hen, "will you help me take this wheat to the mill, Pig?" (The Little Red Hen)

Since Well is not a question, it seems odd to have asked in the more presupposed, medial, position, than in the equally available "new information" position it has in (18a).

It seems that inversion with 'manner of speaking verbs' is acceptable and appropriate if extra content in the verb is not particularly important to the development of the narrative, as in (15b), (17b), and (19a) (note

the oddness of (19b)), or if something about the subject dictates that it go in final position.

19a. "May we play with her?" cheeped the yellow chicks. (Miffy)

19b. "May we play with her?" the yellow chicks cheeped.

We have seen a number of pragmatic functions for which reordering rules can be exploited interacting here to determine the syntax of quote-containing sentences: mimicry of the rhythm of real dialogue, distribution of new and old information, relative importance to the development of the narrative of verb, quote, and other constituents. This interaction is complex and far from being entirely understood. But I hope to have demonstrated that the alternation found in texts between S V Q, Q S V, and Q V S is certainly not just for variety's sake, as one might suppose from reading a text which employed only one.

So-called "Emphatic" Functions

Let us turn our attention now to the most discussed, and perhaps least understood use of inversion, the so-called "emphatic" inversion.[7] Some actual examples of types cited in the linguistic literature as emphatic are given in (20). The first two are from S. J. Perelman short stories; the other two from children's books.

20a. Through the revolving doors swept Tom Pulsifer.

20b. Springing from its catacomb with a hoard of Kate Greenaway prints he had unearthed came Spitalny, hair as tumultuous as ever but powdered with silver.

20c. There before her eyes was the red button she had been looking for. (The Land of the Lost Buttons)

20d. Outside stood a little angel. (Miffy)

These seem to be the constructions grammarians have had in mind when they have written on inversion. Jamieson (1853) for example, speaks of the purpose of inversion in the following terms.

> ... by suspending the appearance of some capital word or circumstance, curiosity may be excited, and artfully prolonged, till the conclusion of the period discloses the mystery, and impresses the sense deeper on the mind.
>
> All discourse addressed to the understanding, seldom permits much inversion. More of it is allowed in works addressed to the imagination, and most of all in those productions which are intended to rouse and interest the passions and emotions of the heart.

Gary (1975) quite independently characterized inversion after preposed locative and participial phrases generally as indicating that an event or locative relationship was contrary to expectation. But only Fowler (1923) distinguishes non-emphatic functions of inversion.[8] He mentions euphonic, connective, "signpost" (puts a non-subject "theme" in initial position), negative, and exclamatory functions, among others. But even he uses the "exclamatory" category as a 'wastebasket term' for constructions as diverse as (21a-c).

21a. How dreadful is this place!

21b. Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.

21c. Bitterly did he rue it.

It is evident that Jamieson and Gary have overstated the case; we have already examined a number of inversions that do not create suspense. But I find it equally evident that the use of some inversions must be described in terms that relate to expectation, and its intensive, suspense.

I have not arrived at a fully satisfactory characterization, but the use of examples like (20a-d) seems to me best described in terms of the resolution of some apparent disorder in narrative structure. In (20a) and (20b), this disorder is that the characters named by the postposed subject NP were introduced as central characters, but the text has not mentioned them for some time. These sentences bring them back into the action. In (20c), this absence from the scene is reflected in the description of the subject ("the red button she had been looking for"). In fact, (20c) is a rather interesting exploitation of this function of inversion. This sentence is the third to last in the story, and although the button is the principal character in this narrative, the search for it has not been mentioned since the beginning of the story.

Since these examples which I have described as serving to resolve an apparent disorder in narrative structure, e.g. by reintroducing some central entity in an unexpected place, are in their internal structure no different from examples I have claimed serve a connective or introductory function--examples (20a,b,c,d) are matched by (11b, 10b, 10a, 11a) respectively--it is instructive to compare contexts in which an example serves each of the uses. Item (22a) gives the immediate context in which (20d) occurs.

22a. One night there was a tap on the window. Mrs. Rabbit peeped through the window. Outside stood a little angel. "Your wish is granted," it said. "A baby rabbit is on her way to you." (Miffy)

The first sentence sets up a brief, and minor, anomaly in the telling of the story: a significant action, tapping, is asserted, but the agent is

not mentioned. Sentence (20d) names in the "new information," focused position, an individual who could be the agent, thus implicating that it was indeed the agent, and resolving the tension created by the anomalous statement. This apparently is a very aesthetically satisfactory way to meddle with the order of events in the writing of narrative--compare (22a), which is hardly taken from a literary masterpiece, with (22b), which is not only dull by comparison, but disconcerting in the casual mention of the angel, as if it were no less expected than, say, a moth.

22b. One night an angel tapped at the window.

If we compare (22a) to (22c) and (22d), the difference between the resolution function and the scene-setting function is evident.

22c. The guest-house was densely populated with ceramic, stone, and wrought metal sculptures. There was an enormous stainless steel frog and two tiny elves in the foyer, and outside stood a little angel.

22d. When I arrived at the Pearly Gates, St. Peter was seated at a desk in a little sentry box. Outside stood a little angel, intently observing the proceedings.

When we read the context preceding Outside stood a little angel in (22c) and (22d), we have no expectations about the content of the sentences to follow. When we read (22a), we do; we expect that the writer will tell us, sooner or later, or at least enable us to infer, what made the tapping.

I am fairly well satisfied with the description of these inversions as marking the resolution of apparent anomalies in discourse structure, and I must guess that it is this effect of marking this particular kind of joint in discourse structure that has led some writers to call them

emphatic. That is, the emphatic effect is a function of the form of the discourse, the order in which information is presented, not, apparently, a function of the form of the sentence. It remains unclear to me what is gained by the use of inversion to mark this kind of juncture. How does making the reader wait two constituents more for the "mystery" to be resolved resolve it any better than putting the sentence in canonical order? To say that the important NP is put, in this construction, into the "focused," "new information" position does not answer the question.

Resolution inversions are not the only inversions which create an effect of emphasis. The inversions exemplified in (23) seem "emphatic" as well, but the source of emphaticness seems to lie more in sentence structure than in discourse structure.

23a. Some of them are very beautiful, but most important are their fascinating detail and accuracy. (Inversion after Preposed Adjective Phrase)

23b. Such was my respect for him, that even after I switched to martinis I still ordered sweet Manhattans when Gus was behind the bar. (Such ... that Inversion)

23c. The difference must lie in the length of the subject, and the misconception must be that it is a case for balance inversion, i.e. for saving the verb from going unnoticed; but so little does that matter that if the verb is omitted no harm is done. (So ... that Inversion)

23d. Not since an American battleship, many years before, firing a 21-gun salute in honor of the President of France, had accidentally used real shells and blown the bejezus out of the harbor of Le Havre had the American Navy so royally loused up a situation. (Inversion after Preposed Negative Adverbial)

23e. Rarely did I hear such overtones of gratitude as went into the utterance of this compound noun. (Inversion after Preposed Negative Adverb)

23f. Only when Mr. Joseph turns to his files for actual visual examples--case histories, so to speak--does his book come alive, and then with a vigor and bounce unmatched in Freud. (Inversion after Negative Advertial)

23g. No sooner was the door closed than the car leaped forward violently, and afterward went racing wildly along the street, narrowly missing collision with innumerable things. (No sooner ... than Inversion)

23h. Expected to draw considerable interest are the quilts made by women of the East Bend church.

Their emphaticness does not seem to reside in any disruption of expectation, except in the trivial sense of exhibiting a statistically unusual word order. Perhaps the fact that they do not seem to signal disruptions of expected discourse structure should not be surprising, since, except for (23g), they are more typical of descriptive or argumentative prose than of prose which narrates events, and if the former genres are more rigidly structured, there is less likely to be a sanctioned opportunity to stray from a predictable order of stating things. It is interesting to note that the Preposed Adjective Phrase in inversions like (23a) typically contains a connective word, usually a comparative word such as equally, less, but, or more, and so, serves a connective function as well, relating what is being compared, to some standard mentioned earlier in the discourse.

It may be that example (23h), and perhaps the others as well, gets its emphatic "aura" precisely, and exclusively, because the major constituents are not in the normal, expected order. What I am suggesting here is a Gricean sort of conveyed meaning: what may happen is that the reader observes that the major constituents in the sentence are out of order, and is momentarily distracted by it, and led to wonder why the

order is as it is. Since the preposed phrase does not have a connective function, we may conclude that the writer must simply have wanted to call attention to the content of the sentence by calling attention to the sentence itself.[9] Or perhaps the writer achieves this effect by using a form which increases processing time by syntactic means, just by putting constituents in a non-canonical order. In either case, it is relevant that unlike the examples of inversion cited as resolving discourse structural 'disorder', in this case, as in all of the "emphatic" inversions of (23), we can put the sentence back in normal (S V O A) order without producing incoherence or unwanted implicatures. The test of this hypothesis that inversions such as those in (23) achieve an emphatic effect by causing the reader (or hearer) to concentrate more on the sentence in which they occur is whether these inversions require increased processing time compared to, say, connective and resolution inversions. This can, presumably, be verified with the use of sophisticated eye-movement tracking equipment, or tachistoscopic experiments.

If my suggestion is correct that inversion accomplishes an emphatic function just by slowing down processing of the discourse at the point of the sentence containing the inversion, then it must be asked why we cannot invert any statement to make it emphatic, and why we can't just scramble the words any old way. That is, why isn't (24b) a way of saying (24a), and (24c) a way of saying (23e)?

24a. Phrase-structure rules can certainly describe such relations!

24b. "Certainly can Phrase-structure rules describe such relations.

24c. *Such overtones of gratitude as went into the utterance of this compound noun heard I rarely.

But the answer to this may have to be sought in a historical description rather than a synchronic one. The twenty to forty inversion structures I have catalogued (elsewhere) in Modern English may be semi-frozen relics of processes more productive in an earlier stage of the language.

Conclusion

I have described some functions of inversion constructions which seem to reflect or exploit the surface order of constituents, in different ways, and at different levels. I would like to suggest, before concluding, that "euphony" accounts of inversion that say that inversion is appropriate under certain conditions if the subject NP is sufficiently long ("heavy") have got the cart before the horse. Rather, I think it may be more useful to think of inversion of subject and verb as a stylistic option which allows the writer (or speaker) to make the subject NP longer, and thereby pack more material into the sentence. Examples (9a) and (20b) are probably examples of this as well as of other, communicative, functions of inversion. It is not coincidental that inverted subjects tend to be syntactically long and complex, and bear new information. Because they are long, they bear a lot of information (and vice-versa), and because they have a lot of information, they are bound to contain information which is new relative to the discourse.

When I first started working on inversions, I imagined that each inversion would have its own function, its own raison d'etre. Now, four years later, I find a rather large number of pragmatic functions, but they are distributed over, rather than among, the syntactic inversion

types. These pragmatic functions range from strictly practical solutions to problems of encoding, through rhetorical functions of connection and introduction, down-playing and fore-grounding, and resolution of apparent discourse-structural anomaly, to what might be called the "Yippee-function"--markedness for noticeability's sake. Some of these functions derive from the initial position of the preposed phrase that triggers inversion, some from the final position of the subject after inversion, and one from the total reordering. And we saw the same syntactic types cited as examples of function after function. I am reminded here of the constellations of syntactic facts that used to be discussed in terms of the notion 'target structure', only here we seem to have an added dimension, the pragmatic functions. Specifically, we have a large number of inversion rules (on the order of twenty to forty, depending on what counts as the same rule--not an easy question to answer (cf. Sheintuch, 1977)) creating two basic structural types:

X V S Y

and

X Aux S V Y,

and a smaller number of functions, which may be served by various constructions of both types. The point I hope I have made is that the language allows the exploitation of various incidental and crucial properties of these types to create a variety of rhetorical effects, and serve a variety of pragmatic purposes.

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Footnotes

[1]One basketball broadcaster uses Here is Player-Name Prepositional Phrase almost exclusively. Another speaks almost exclusively in sentences with a pronoun referring to the ball as subject, as in Adverb it goes/comes to Player-Name.

[2]Basketball play-by-plays are the only context where I have seen directional phrases preceding inversion over be. Usually with a directional phrase we find a motion verb, as in (i):

i. Into the garden ran a little mouse.

In fact, even uninverted directional phrases are odd with be, as in (ii) and (iii).

ii. ??Dave Brenner is into the game.

iii. ??A little mouse is into the graden.

Presumably it is a different into that we find in (iv).

iv. The baby is into the catfood again.

[3]Clauses of the form X Subject-NP Inflected-form-of-'be' seem to be uniformly ungrammatical for non-null X, except where X is a pronominal adverb like so and the NP is a pronoun, as in (i-iv).

i. *Supporting merger Mary and Lachlan Blair were.

ii. *At issue only one section was.

iiia. So it was.

iiib. So he was.

iv. ??So John was.

I cannot explain why these are not grammatical, why inversion is obligatory except in cases like (iii), but it is not a question of segmental phonology, as (v) is as bad as (iv), despite having the same phonological form as (iiib).

v. ??So Hee was.

[4]I ignore for the moment the possibility of S V and V S interrupting the quotation object, as in (i) and (ii).

i. "The newspaper," John said, "is late again."

ii. "The newspaper," said John, "is late again."

From Hermon's (1978) data, these seem to behave like preposed quotation forms. There is also a V S: O/Q order, as in (iii):

iii. Says John: "The newspaper is late again."

This last form seems to be the only conversational format in which direct quotes can be embedded, and even it is rather stylized.

[5]It is not merely a matter of syntactic complexity, or gross semantic baggage, as quotes <u>can</u> be preposed when the non-quote part of the sentence is syntactically complex, as in (i).

i. "I'm going to New Orleans!" said Tom, his eyes aglow at the thought of this unhoped-for opportunity to spend the rest of the winter in a place that was not only exciting and alive, but far from the bitter cold and chill winds of Fargo.

The fact that the postmodifier on the subject makes the subject NP long in relation to the preposed quote, and the fact that no new characters,

settings, or actions are introduced in this long subject NP probably both contribute to the naturalness of (i) in comparison to its unpreposed, uninverted counterpart.

[6]At least in texts that include both Q V S and Q S V. Not all do.

[7]This is an exaggeration. We have at least a glimmer of an explanation for why inversion may produce the effect we call emphasis. But I haven't the least idea what is functional about inversion in the following kinds of cases.

ia. It represents the business interests of Germany as does no other organization. (Inversion in Comparative Clause)

ib. Came a terrific flash of lightning and a clap of thunder. (Inversion after Suppressed "then")

ic. Comes the revolution, we'll all eat strawberries and cream. (Inversion after Suppressed "when")

id. Were it not for the glossary of swing terms thoughtfully supplied by the management at the very outset, the magazine might as well be couched in Chinook. (Inversion after Suppressed Counterfactual "if")

Of these, all but (ia) occur in spoken as well as written discourse, (ic) perhaps exclusively so. All of these forms are reversible, in that they can occur with subject and verb in "normal" order as well, as shown in (ii).

iia. It represents the business interests of Germany as no other organization does.

iib. A terrific flash of lightning and a clap of thunder came.

iic. When the revolution comes, we'll all eat strawberries and cream.

iid. If it were not for the glossary of swing terms thoughtfully supplied by the management at the outset, the magazine might as well be couched in Chinook.

[8]Indeed, his article on inversion begins with one which refers to the heading, "Inversion":

> By this is here meant merely the abandonment of the usual English sentence order and the placing of the subject after the verb, as in Said he, or after the auxiliary of the verb, as in What did he say? and Never shall we see his like again.

[9]This phenomenon of a marked word order necessarily bearing implicature is quite widespread, across constructions, and across languages (cf. Davison, 1978).

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